

Reading Essentials and Study Guide

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America and World War II, 1941-1945

Lesson 2 *The War in the Pacific*

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What kinds of sacrifices does war require?

Reading HELPDESK

Content Vocabulary

amphtrac an amphibious tractor used to move troops from ships to shore

kamikaze during World War II, a Japanese suicide pilot whose mission was to crash into his target

Academic Vocabulary

code a signal or symbol used to represent something that is to be kept secret

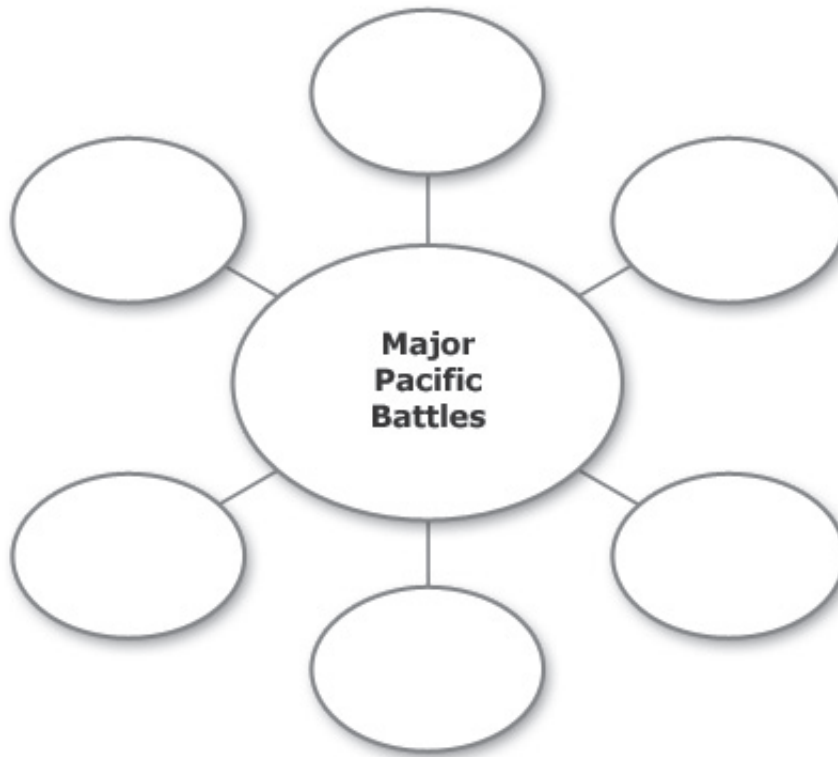
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TAKING NOTES: Organizing

ACTIVITY Use the following graphic organizer to record the major battles discussed and the victor in each.



IT MATTERS BECAUSE

The early battles of the war led both the Americans and the Japanese to change their plans. The Battle of Midway was a major turning point against the Japanese. After that, Admiral Nimitz and General MacArthur led American forces in a steady advance across the Pacific.

Holding the Line Against Japan

GUIDING QUESTION Why was the Doolittle Raid important for U.S. forces in the Pacific?

The Japanese had badly hurt the American ships at Pearl Harbor. However, the U.S. aircraft carriers based at Pearl Harbor were at sea when the Japanese attacked. They were not damaged. The United States had several carriers in the Pacific. Admiral Chester Nimitz was determined to use them. Nimitz was the commander of the U.S. Navy in the Pacific. He began planning how to fight against the Japanese navy right away. However, there was little the United States could do to keep Japan from moving into Southeast Asia.

The Fall of the Philippines

A few hours after bombing Pearl Harbor, the Japanese attacked U.S. airfields in

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the Philippines. Two days later, Japanese troops arrived. The American and Filipino forces defending the Philippines did not have enough soldiers to win a battle. Their commander, General Douglas MacArthur, decided to retreat to the Bataan Peninsula. Bataan's rugged land formations helped the troops. U.S. and Filipino soldiers were able to defend their position for more than three months.

By March the troops were desperate—they were out of food and supplies. Eventually, they had to eat the horses and mules they had with them. The troops also struggled with diseases such as malaria, scurvy, and dysentery. In these awful conditions, the women of the Army Nurse Corps cared for the sick and injured soldiers. Patients slept outside in the open air. When they needed more space, they cut down trees.

Roosevelt knew that the American people might lose hope if MacArthur were captured. For this reason, President Roosevelt ordered the general to leave Bataan and go to Australia. MacArthur made a famous promise as he left, declaring, "I shall return."

On April 9, 1942, the defenders finally surrendered. The Japanese forced 78,000 prisoners of war to march 65 miles (105 km) to a Japanese prison camp. Nearly 10,000 soldiers died on the Bataan Death March.

Sixty-six women nurses were also captured and sent to the University of Santo Tomas in Manila. The Bataan nurses stayed in Manila until early in 1945. Their fellow prisoners included 11 other nurses from the navy and 3,000 Allied civilians.

One small force on the island of Corregidor in Manila Bay continued to hold on even after the Bataan troops surrendered. Finally, in May 1942, Corregidor surrendered. The Philippines had fallen to the Japanese.

The Doolittle Raid on Tokyo

The fall of the Philippines to the Japanese discouraged the American people. Even before the surrender, President Roosevelt was looking for a victory to raise morale. He wanted to bomb Tokyo, but the U.S. bombers could not reach the Japanese capital. The planes needed to be carried within range on aircraft carriers. Unfortunately Japanese ships in the North Pacific blocked U.S. aircraft carriers from bringing the bombers close enough to Japan.

The carriers usually carried short-range bombers. Military planners suggested using long-range B-25 bombers instead. The B-25s could attack from farther away. This was a daring plan—the B-25s were too big to land on the short deck of an aircraft carrier. After attacking Japan, the bombers would have to fly to China to land.

President Roosevelt put Lieutenant Colonel James Doolittle in charge of the mission to bomb Tokyo. In March, sixteen B-25s were loaded onto the aircraft carrier *Hornet*. The *Hornet* headed west across the Pacific. On April 18, U.S. bombs fell on Japan for the first time.

Japan Changes Strategy

The success of the mission boosted American morale and frightened Japanese leaders. The leaders realized the bombs could have killed Emperor Hirohito, whom they honored as a god. The Doolittle Raid changed Japanese war planning.

Before the Doolittle Raid, leaders in the Japanese navy disagreed about their strategy. Some Japanese naval officers wanted to capture the south coast of New Guinea to cut off U.S. supply lines to Australia. Admiral Yamamoto, the commander of the fleet, wanted to attack Midway Island instead. Midway was the last U.S. base in the North Pacific west of Hawaii. Yamamoto believed that attacking Midway would draw the U.S. ships in the Pacific into battle. Yamamoto

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believed his fleet could then destroy the U.S. Navy in the Pacific.

After Doolittle's raid, Japanese war planners supported Yamamoto's idea. They felt destroying the American fleet was the best way to protect Tokyo from more bombing. The Japanese still planned to attack New Guinea. However, only three aircraft carriers were assigned to the mission. Six other carriers were sent to attack Midway.

The Battle of the Coral Sea

The Japanese believed that they could successfully launch two attacks at once because their operations were secret. They did not know that a U.S. team in Hawaii had already broken the Japanese navy's secret **code**.

In March 1942, decoded Japanese messages alerted the United States to the Japanese attack on New Guinea. Admiral Nimitz sent the carriers *Yorktown* and *Lexington* to intercept the Japanese in the Coral Sea. The Japanese and the United States launched fierce attacks from the air against each other. The Japanese sank the *Lexington*. They badly damaged the *Yorktown*. However, the U.S. attacks prevented the Japanese from landing on New Guinea's south coast. The supply lines to Australia stayed open.

The Navajo Code Talkers

American marines used radios to communicate when they attacked an enemy beach. Unfortunately, the Japanese could intercept and translate the messages. In the middle of a battle, the marines did not have time to use a code-machine. An engineer named Philip Johnston had a solution. Johnston had lived on a Navajo reservation as a child. He suggested that the marines recruit Navajos to serve as "code talkers."

The Navajo language had no written alphabet. The only people who knew the language were the Navajo and a few missionaries and anthropologists. The Navajo recruits developed a code based on their own language. They used code words for military terms. The Navajo used words such as *lo-tso* (whale) to mean battleship, and their word for potatoes stood for grenades.

Code talkers were very useful in combat. They could communicate a message in minutes that would take code-machine operators hours to translate and send. At the battle of Iwo Jima, code talkers sent more than 800 messages during the first 48 hours to keep communication going during that fierce battle. The code talkers were such a well-kept secret that their mission was not revealed until 1971. In 2001 Congress awarded the code talkers the Congressional Gold Medal to honor their unique contribution during the war.

PROGRESS CHECK

Explaining What did the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo accomplish?

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Battle of Midway

GUIDING QUESTION Why was the Battle of Midway a turning point in the war in the Pacific?

The U.S. code-breaking team learned about the plan to attack Midway. Admiral Yamamoto needed to communicate with many ships. He used a radio to share the plans for the Midway attack. Although he used a code, it was the same code that the United States had already figured out.

Admiral Nimitz wanted to ambush the Japanese fleet and ordered carriers to move to positions near Midway. The Japanese did not know that they were heading into an ambush. They launched their planes against Midway on June 4, 1942. The United States was ready. In the first attack, the United States shot down 38 Japanese planes. The Japanese prepared to send a second set of planes to attack Midway. The United States launched a counterattack from the carriers *Hornet*, *Yorktown*, and *Enterprise*. The U.S. planes caught the Japanese carriers with fuel, bombs, and airplanes sitting on the unprotected decks. The fuel and bombs exploded quickly when hit, so the Japanese carriers burned quickly. A fourth carrier sank a few hours later. Admiral Yamamoto commanded the rest of his ships to retreat.

The Battle of Midway was a turning point in the war. The Japanese navy lost four large carriers. Just six months after Pearl Harbor, the United States had stopped the Japanese from moving forward. However, the victory cost the lives of 362 Americans and 3,057 Japanese.

PROGRESS CHECK

Explaining Why was the United States able to ambush the Japanese at Midway and turn the tide of the war?

Driving Back Japan

GUIDING QUESTIONS What was the military strategy behind “island-hopping”? Was it successful?

The U.S. plan to defeat Japan called for a two-part attack. Admiral Nimitz led the first part as commander of the Pacific Fleet. The Pacific Fleet would advance through the central Pacific by “hopping” from one island to the next, moving closer and closer to Japan with each step. At the same time, General MacArthur’s troops would advance through the Solomon Islands and capture the north coast of New Guinea. From there, they would launch an invasion to retake the Philippines.

Island-Hopping in the Pacific

By the fall of 1943, the navy was ready to launch its island-hopping campaign. However, the geography of the central Pacific caused a problem. Many of the islands were made of giant rings of coral reef. The water over the coral reef was not always deep enough to allow landing boats to get to the shore. If landing boats got stuck on the reef, the troops had to wade to the beach, which could

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cause very high casualties during an invasion. For example, some 5,000 United States Marines had difficulties wading ashore at Tarawa Atoll. Tarawa, part of the Gilbert Islands, was the navy's first goal. The United States wanted to build air bases on the Marshall Islands nearby. For this to happen, the United States needed to capture the Japanese base on Tarawa.

As they approached Tarawa, the landing boats hit the reef. At least 20 ships got stuck. The troops had to wade several hundred yards in shoulder-high water to the beach. The Japanese fired at them as they waded to shore. Only one out of every three marines made it to shore. Finally, the surviving marines reached the beach, but the battle was not over.

Although many troops died wading to shore, one vehicle landed troops safely. The vehicle was a boat with tank tracks, nicknamed the "Alligator." This amphibious tractor, or **amphtrac**, was invented in the late 1930s to rescue people in Florida swamps. An amphtrac had never been used in combat, but in 1941, the navy bought 200 of them. Having more amphtracs at Tarawa might have lowered the number of casualties.

More than 1,000 marines died on Tarawa. Vivid photos of the casualties shocked Americans back home and made them wonder how many lives would be lost defeating Japan.

After Tarawa, U.S. forces attacked Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands. This attack went much more smoothly because all of the troops went to shore in amphtracs. The Japanese resisted fiercely but Kwajalein was captured with fewer casualties than Tarawa. In addition, nearby Eniwetok was captured.

After winning the Marshall Islands, the navy targeted the Mariana Islands. U.S. military planners wanted to use the Marianas as a base for a new heavy bomber, the B-29 Superfortress, which could fly farther than any other plane in the world. From airfields in the Marianas, B-29s could bomb Japan. Admiral Nimitz decided to invade three of the Mariana Islands: Saipan, Tinian, and Guam. The Japanese put up strong resistance, but U.S. troops finally captured all three islands by August 1944. A few months later, B-29s began bombing Japan.

MacArthur Returns

The forces under Admiral Nimitz continued to hop across the central Pacific. Meanwhile, General Douglas MacArthur's troops began their own campaign in the southwest Pacific that began with the invasion of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands in August 1942. It continued until early 1944. By then, MacArthur's troops had captured enough islands to surround the main Japanese base in the region. In response, the Japanese removed their ships and aircraft from their base—but left 100,000 troops to hold the island.

MacArthur worried that the navy's advance across the central Pacific was leaving him behind, so he ordered his forces to travel nearly 600 miles (966 km) to capture the Japanese base at Hollandia on the north coast of New Guinea. After MacArthur's troops captured Hollandia, they took the island of Morotai—the last stop before the Philippines.

To take back the Philippines, the United States put together a huge invasion force. In October 1944, more than 700 ships carrying more than 160,000 men sailed for Leyte Gulf in the Philippines. On October 20, the troops began to land on Leyte, an island on the eastern side of the Philippines. A few hours after the invasion began, MacArthur reached the beach. The United States had taken the

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Philippines. MacArthur had said he would return to the Philippines and he kept his promise.

To stop the U.S. invasion, the Japanese sent four aircraft carriers toward the Philippines from the north while secretly sending another fleet from the west. Believing that the Japanese carriers were leading the main attack, the American carriers left Leyte Gulf and headed north to stop them. The secret fleet of Japanese warships to the west raced through the Philippine Islands into Leyte Gulf. They ambushed the remaining U.S. ships.

The Battle of Leyte Gulf was the largest naval battle in history. It was also the first time that the Japanese used **kamikaze** attacks. *Kamikaze* means “divine wind” in Japanese and refers to the great storm that destroyed the Mongol fleet during its invasion of Japan in the thirteenth century. Kamikaze pilots deliberately crashed their planes into U.S. ships. Although the pilots killed themselves, they also caused great damage. The situation was becoming desperate for the United States. Luckily, the Japanese commander believed that more U.S. ships were on the way and ordered a retreat.

The campaign to recapture the Philippines from the Japanese was long and difficult. More than 80,000 Japanese were killed. Fewer than 1,000 Japanese surrendered. MacArthur’s troops did not capture Manila until March 1945. The battle left the city in ruins, and more than 100,000 Filipino civilians were killed. The remaining Japanese retreated into the rugged land north of Manila. These troops were still fighting in August 1945 when word came that Japan had surrendered.

PROGRESS CHECK

Describing How did the United States Navy successfully drive back Japanese forces in the Pacific?
